

# **The Strategy of Developing Relations between the Slovak Republic and the**

## **RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

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### **1. Introduction**

The current foreign policy priorities and integration ambitions of the Slovak Republic have created the need to formulate a clear strategy of developing relations between Slovakia and the Russian Federation that will be compatible with the approach of Euro-Atlantic political and economic structures. Relations with the Russian Federation have an important position in our foreign policy, and form an inseparable part of this policy's priority of orientation towards European integration. The Slovak Republic conducts relations with the Russian Federation in line with its future status as a member of the European Union and NATO. Despite the fact that in programme and conceptual documents – from the Government's Programme Declaration, through Foreign Policy Priorities for 2000 – 2003, to the annual, more detailed, Foreign Policy Objectives of the Slovak Republic – the basic philosophy of Slovakia's approach towards Russia has not changed since 1993, its specific content and substance has undergone certain changes that reflect the internal political situation in both countries. The stated principles of this philosophy are partnership, trust, mutual benefit, transparency, balance, and flexibility. They create the necessary space for the development of good relations, whilst not artificially impeding their advancement in any particular direction. Limiting factors in mutual relations, which are dependent upon the prevailing geopolitical situation, include the strategic, national, and economic interests of both parties.

### **2. The initial situation**

The Russian Federation, in view of its size, opportunities, human potential, and raw material wealth, will be an important factor in the Euro-Asian area over the long term.

The Russian Federation is currently undergoing a process of intensive transformation. Russia is being modernised from top to bottom, and the greater part of society accepts these changes. Everything suggests that the period following the accession of Vladimir Putin to the post of Russian President will, at least over the next decade, play the most important role in forming Russia's overall image. The fundamental characteristics of this period are the consolidation of the state and state authority

(primarily central authority), an orientation towards the creation of a liberal economy (restricted, however, by the situation in Russia, including its limited levels of foreign capital), the stabilisation of conditions for the development of a standard and democratic political system, and the completion of the privatisation process. The observance of human rights (especially with regard to Chechnya), and the freedom of the press are currently open and much-discussed questions. From the very beginning, the foreign policy of this period has been characterised by the effort to embrace greater levels of realism, flexibility, and especially pragmatism. Russia's interest and objective is, on the basis of its newly-established internal state authority, to maintain or renew its position and influence in the global political, economic, and security arena. In its approaches, Russia will be more inclined to change the form, rather than the substance, of its interests and goals. It will utilise some of its comparative advantages (its military and geopolitical potential, its mineral resources, including energy resources, its certain scientific and technical potential, and its significant cultural dominance in some neighbouring countries). On the part of Russian society, an increasing level of acceptance of all things foreign can be counted upon. The development of partner-like and open relations with the Russian Federation is both possible and necessary; for example, in the area of strengthening the cooperative aspects of Russian relations with European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The development of cooperation between the Russian Federation and NATO currently stems from the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation of May 1997. Slovakia considers this document, along with the function of the Permanent Joint Council of NATO and the Russian Federation, to be one of the key elements of the newly-forming European security area. The international situation has created greater interest on the part of Russia in changing the nature of its relations with NATO. The NAC has reacted to this by opting for a new quality of cooperation within the '20' format, as opposed to the previous '19+1' format, under a new title – the 'NATO – Russia Council'. An important part of emerging relations between the Russian Federation and NATO is the fight against international terrorism, in which Russia has unequivocally placed itself on the side of the USA, thus indirectly supporting NATO, and within the framework of cooperation with NATO, opening up new facets in their relations. The Slovak Republic, as a part of its process of accession into the organisation, will coordinate its foreign policy towards the Russian Federation with that of NATO, so that after Slovakia's accession, it will be ready to participate in cooperation between NATO and Russia, and this within the framework set out by the NATO – Russia Council.

Slovakia's foreign policy with regard to Russia will also be wholly coordinated to that of the European Union, as set out in the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation of 1st December 1997. An important document emphasising the significance that the European Union attributes to the Russian Federation is the Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia of 22/7/2002, which contains the following basic priorities:

(1) In the **political area**:

- Consolidating democracy, the rule of law, and public institutions (the reform of the legal system in the Russian Federation);
- The integration of Russia into a common European economic and social area;

- Cooperation aimed at strengthening stability and security in Europe and beyond (support for the Russian Federation in managing conflicts in the CIS).

(2) In the **economic area**•:

- Consolidating the process of economic reform in Russia;
- Assisting Russia in its integration into international economic structures;
- Increasing trade with Russia;
- An energy partnership aimed at meeting the European Union's energy needs from Russian resources.

(3) In the **security area**:

- Developing mutual cooperation in the creation of a European security structure;
- Strengthening cooperation with Russia in resolving specific crises;
- Cooperation in the area of disarmament, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and controls on the export of weapons.

(4) In **other areas**:

- Cooperation in the area of environmental protection, a higher level of safety at nuclear facilities, and the fight against organised crime.

It must also be mentioned that the terrorist attacks on the USA established a greater level of solidarity and the need for cooperation between the EU and Russia. With regard to this, both sides expressed an interest in improving cooperation and the exchange of information in the fight against terrorism, while the EU eased its criticism of Russia's policy towards Chechen separatists.

The Russian Federation is an important partner for Slovakia. Alongside its political and security significance, it holds particular importance for the Slovak Republic in economic areas (the export of energy supplies and raw materials, transit territory, regional cooperation, etc.). Slovak – Russian relations are characterised by a lack of controversial issues, which creates good prospects for further, multi-faceted development, even after the Slovak Republic's accession to the EU. This has been confirmed by recent high-level visits – in particular, the visit to Moscow made by the Slovak Prime Minister, Mikuláš Dzurinda, in April 2003, and the visit to Slovakia made by the Russian Foreign Minister, Ivan Ivanov, in July 2003.

The Russian Federation is increasingly perceiving the Slovak Republic more broadly – as a component of the Visegrad 4 and the Central European area as a whole. In reality, the Russian Federation will be interested in Slovakia as a transit country and a member of integrated groups.

### **3. The main interests and objectives of the Slovak Republic with regard to the Russian Federation**

The main interests of the Slovak Republic with regard to the Russian Federation are:

- Contributing to the efforts of the international community in supporting democratic development (including the issue of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms), and the stabilisation of the Russian Federation; encouraging its cooperation in political, economic, and security areas in Europe and the world at large;
- Maintaining and developing trade and economic relations with the Russian Federation, while seeking ways of limiting Slovakia's unilateral dependence on the import of energy supplies and raw materials from Russia.

The Slovak Republic supports pragmatic and balanced mutual relations with Russia. It is Slovakia's objective to achieve the greatest possible level of dynamism in the area of developing Slovak-Russian relations. Slovakia is interested in developing good, friendly, partner-like relations with Russia, alongside its full participation in ongoing European integration processes.

### **4. Conclusion**

The idea of building a united, prosperous Europe without Russia would be unimaginable, and moreover, incomprehensible. The Russian Federation has long been one of the main spheres of economic and political interest for the Slovak Republic. The objectivity of this interest rests primarily in the extent of Russia's resources, the size of its market, and its geopolitical status. It must be appreciated that the Russian Federation is a key factor in newly-forming European security structures, at a time when the Slovak Republic is culminating its endeavours towards NATO and EU integration.

In summary, it could be said that in view of the Russian Federation's currently positive attitude towards EU enlargement, and its acceptance of NATO enlargement in the wake of the Prague Summit, it is necessary to strive for the creation of good relations with the Russian Federation, assuming that similar interests are expressed on the part of Russia, and that mutual trust is strengthened. Russia is, and will continue to be, a factor that cannot be ignored when establishing long-term stability in Europe. The development of a dialogue with the Russian Federation in line with these facts represents a challenge for the near and medium term, and more comprehensively, for the European Union and NATO. The Slovak Republic wishes to be an active and useful participant in this political process.

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\* [ EU economic aid to Russia is provided through the TACIS programme, which has been promoting the process of economic reform in the country since 1991. It is oriented towards institutional, legal, and administrative reform, including the development of independent media and civil society. It supports the reform of the banking and social sectors. Financial aid is also aimed at easing the process of implementing the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation, as well as Russia's eventual entry into the WTO. ]